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Self-awareness:

A dynamic poster design about self-awareness child development

by

Shuaiqi Xiong

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design Program

School of Design | College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology Rochester, NY

July 04, 2020

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## **Abstract**

Self-awareness is a psychological state in which we see ourselves truthfully and objectively through introspection and reflection. As 90s generation, we are the newest generation of “Chinese-style” individualism, but most of us do not have knowledge of self-awareness. We probably do not acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses, do not accept ourselves, and have no sense of what we do and others think of us. According to our research” says organizational psychologist and researcher Tasha Eurich, “with thousands of people from all around the world, 95 percent of people believe that they’re self-aware, but only about 10 to 15 percent really are (Benjamin 2019).” Lack of self-awareness can make an unexpected harmful impact on people’s career, and life. When you lack self-awareness, you often feel constantly off-kilter, anxious, or angry, and everything in life becomes harder—especially dealing with people (Tepfenhart 2019). The purpose of the thesis is to help people have a deeper, more complex appreciation of who they are. My artwork is a series of dynamic posters based on motion graphics presenting audience with fascinating insights into five levels of self-awareness child development and how to see ourselves clearly. It is aimed at guiding audience to experienced the formation of self-awareness again and encourage audience to cultivate this psychology state.

## **Keywords:**

*psychology, self-awareness, dynamic poster*



## **Introduction**

Only 10%–15% of the people actually fit the criteria of self-awareness. And we don't even realize it. "We are not as self-aware as we think." says Tasha Eurich in her book *Insight*. We forget that majority of our thoughts and actions are on autopilot. So many of us are overconfident about our self-knowledge and overestimate our abilities and skills, especially senior leaders. Meanwhile, we always do introspection in the wrong way due to the ineffective question: "Why?". This is because we simply do not have access to many of the unconscious thoughts, feelings, and motives we are searching for.

Self-awareness has two core sets of knowledge. The first, internal self-awareness, means how clearly we understand our own character, feelings, motives, desires, fit with our environment, and impact on others. The second, external self-awareness, represents knowing how other people view us. Self-awareness psychology does not occur abruptly inspired by one particular behavior. According to Emory University's Philippe Rochat, there are five levels of self-awareness which unfold in early development and six potential prospects ranging from "Level 0: Confusion" (having no self-awareness) advancing complexity to "Level 5: "meta" Self-awareness" (explicit self-awareness) (Rochat 2013).

In my project, I designed a series of dynamic posters based on motion graphics to illuminate the five levels of self-awareness. Natural phenomena as metaphors will be widely used in these dynamic posters to represent these levels. The series of dynamic posters uses certain design composition consisting of two simple geometric shapes, a circle and a rectangle, except the final poster. It helps the all dynamic posters to "stick together" and orientate audience easier across the design.

## **Section I: Context**

Chinese feudalism has its impact on Chinese culture. One of the significant features of the national culture of the Chinese in China and other Chinese-majority societies is “collectivism” or “low individualism” (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 1993).

Many of our elders born in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s have Chinese collectivist mindset. They consider that they belong to 'in groups', which means they must support and protect each other while sacrificing personal independence and profits. From 1990s, China achieved rapid economic growth due to large-scale capital investment and rapid productivity growth. And mainland China became exposed to more western culture, notably pop culture. For 90s generation, most people are able to live a comfortable life and start paying more attention on individuals rather than groups. The spirit of “Chinese-style” individualism is growing rapidly. We are more likely to define ourselves based on our personal traits and see our characteristics, feelings, motives, and desire by “internal”, and we intend to know how people view us and how we get along with others from external.

The 90s generation is the newest generation of “Chinese-style” individualism, but most of us do not have knowledge of self-awareness. We probably do not acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses, do not accept ourselves, and have no sense of what we do and others think of us. Therefore, I reviewed some literature resources to deduce what could have contributed to the problem.

## **Review of literature**

Experience and power can hinder us from building self-Awareness. According to the HBR article, “The more power a leader holds, the more likely they are to overestimate their skills and abilities. One study of more than 3,600 leaders across a variety of roles and industries found that, relative to lower-level leaders, higher-level leaders more significantly overvalued their skills compared with others’ perceptions. In fact, this pattern existed for 19 out of the 20 competencies the researchers measured,

including emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, empathy, trustworthiness, and leadership performance (Benjamin 2019).”

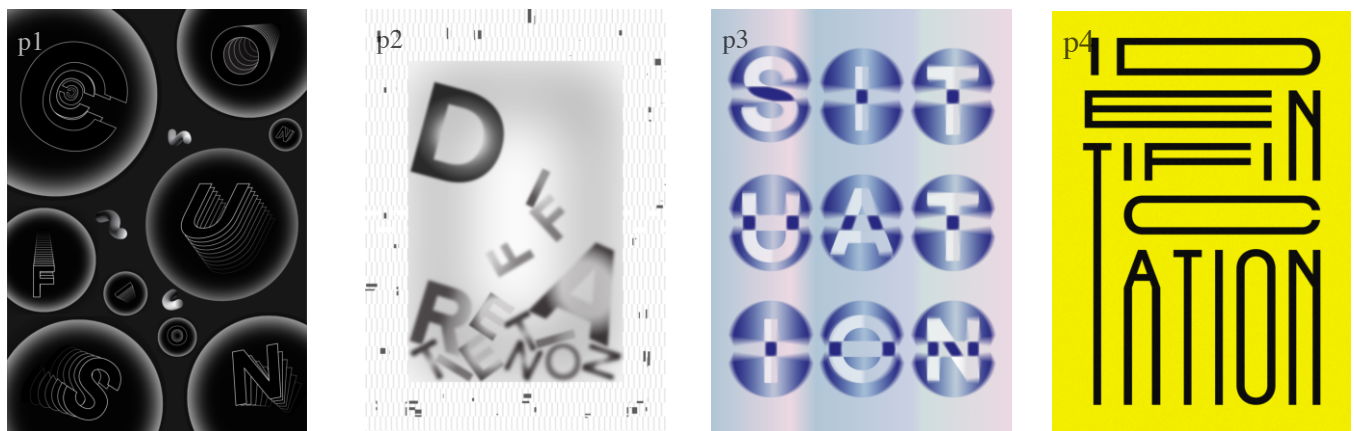
Introspection isn’t ineffective for improving self-awareness—it’s that most people are doing it incorrectly. Why isn’t the right introspective question, is there a better one? My research team scoured hundreds of pages of interview transcripts with highly self-aware people to see if they approached introspection differently. Indeed, there was a clear pattern: Although the word “why” appeared fewer than 150 times, the word “what” appeared more than 1,000 times. Therefore, to increase productive self-insight and decrease unproductive rumination, we should ask what, not why. “What” questions help us stay objective, future-focused, and empowered to act on our new insights (Benjamin 2019).

Self-awareness is critical to our personal and organizational success. Research suggests that when we see ourselves clearly, we are more confident and more creative. We make sounder decisions, build stronger relationships, and communicate more effectively. We’re less likely to lie, cheat, and steal. We are better workers who get more promotions. And we are more-effective leaders with more-satisfied employees and more-profitable companies (Eurich 2018). In a recent podcast interview with Tim Ferris, acclaimed author and researcher Brene Brown made a fascinating claim: The reason there’s so much hate and unhappiness in the world is because people lack self-awareness (Wignall 2020).

However, lack of self-awareness can make an unexpected harmful impact on people’s career, and life. Watch for these warning signs that suggest you lack self-awareness: Defensive—deny bad outcomes and harsh feedback and place blame on others or elsewhere. Micromanage—desire to take control of others instead of leading and supervising them. Passive aggressive—avoid confronting and dealing with something that makes you feel vulnerable or embarrassed. Bully—have no sense of why people think you are a bully. Excuses—get used to avoiding responsibility and blaming others.

## Section II: Methods

Since the advent of motion graphic, I realized that poster animations allow designers to explore the wide range of possibilities, the limitations of digital posters. Kinetic typography can be utilized as a mean for delivering emotion effectively as applying the emotional kinetic motion (S. Jang, 2013). So I considered what if use kinetic typography to describes the content of five levels. This is my first attempt to design a series of looping kinetic typography posters, each based on the name of each level presenting developmental stages. I linked typography and graphic forms by the rhythmic movement, which challenged the fine line between distortion and legibility (Figure 1). After I made some progress, the effect of kinetic typography posters are not ideal due to the limitation of my animation technique. Finally, I gave up this idea because it is not enough to illuminate the psychology topic after discussing with my chief advisor.



*Figure 1, Kinetic typography posters(p1-p4)*

Vasjen Katro is a visual artist from Albania. Baugasm is a self-driven project Vasjen challenged himself to create an amazing, eye-candy poster everyday started in mid of 2016. After more than two years, he has done 756 posters in total. All of posters in Baugasm feature liquify and tasteful gradient effects, 3D art, textures and even a bit of animation. And his distinctive artworks displaying a ton of ambition and a

spark of imagination inspired me. Metaphors can provide cues to viewers how to understand design and shape viewers understanding of design. Dynamic posters can be played continually with a plot to convey information, like storytelling. I started thinking about what if metaphors is widely used in dynamic posters?

Vasjen said that much of his design process is an experimental roundtrip workflow between photography, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop CC and Cinema 4D. It is also an effective method of trying to push software to its limit like striving to finding all these tools that I never thought would be using in design.

At brainstorming session, I used a natural phenomena as metaphor for visualization of five levels. I found that the natural phenomena about light reflection and refraction have some associations with the content of five levels. And then I created a brainstorming map to visualize the relationship of them. I found that metaphorical thinking is beneficial to my imagination and creativity (Figure 2).

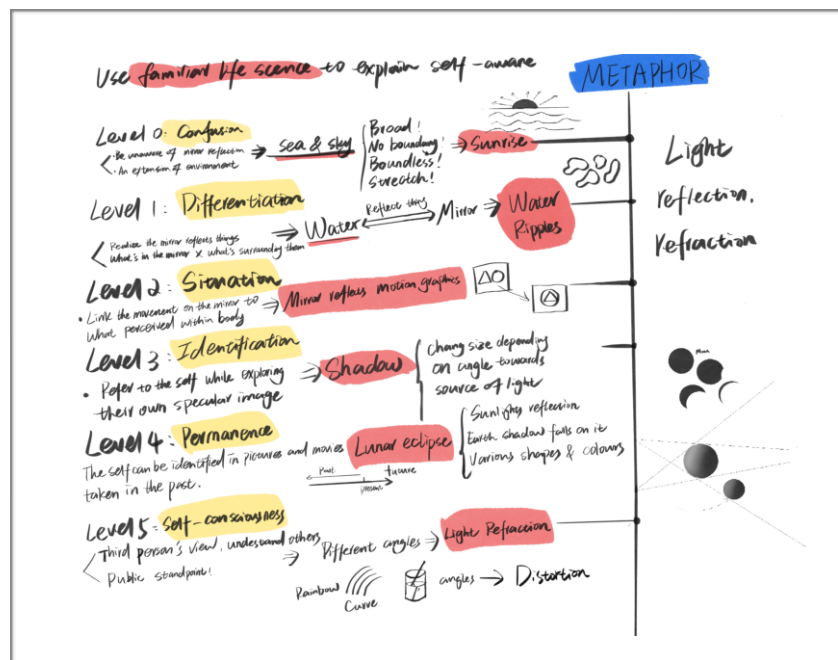
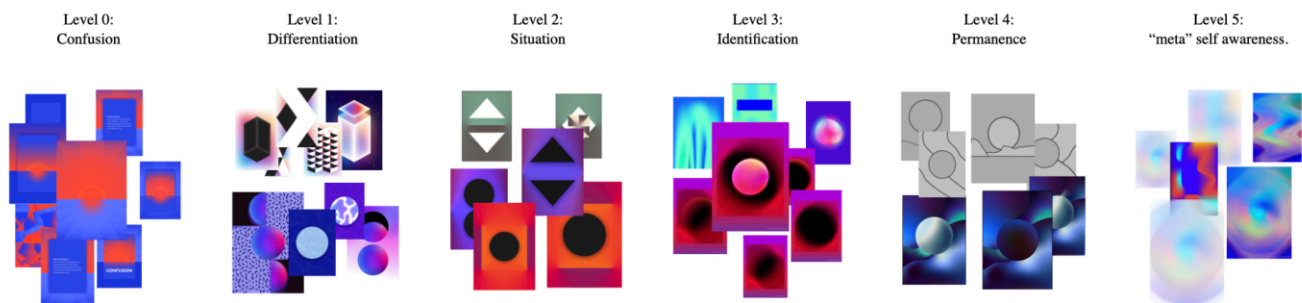


Figure 2, Brainstorming

Afterwards, I confirmed my clear visual direction. I intend to combine colorful gradient, minimal graphic forms, abstract liquid shape and more in the series of dynamic posters.

During iterative design process, I made a number of gradient color attempts and divergent compositions. The most challenging is to conceive layouts and animation at same time. Thus, I spent weeks in iterating idea after idea. At level 1, I realize that the six posters should stick together because this is a series of dynamic posters. So I created certain design composition based on a circle and rectangle. At level 3 and 5, I encountered a number of animation technique obstacles. I spent multiple days solving it. This is an interesting process that explore a bunch of effects in Adobe After Effects. In order to increase the awareness of five levels, the context of five levels will fade-in at the end of each animation (Figure 3).

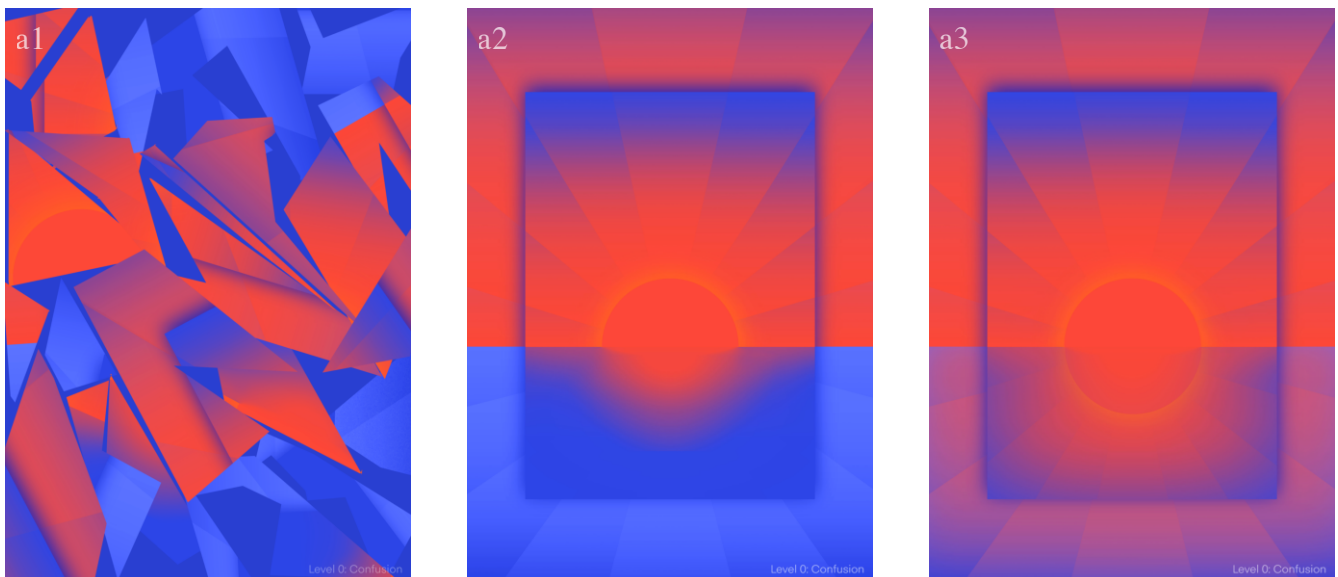


*Figure 3, Iteration*

## Level 0: Confusion

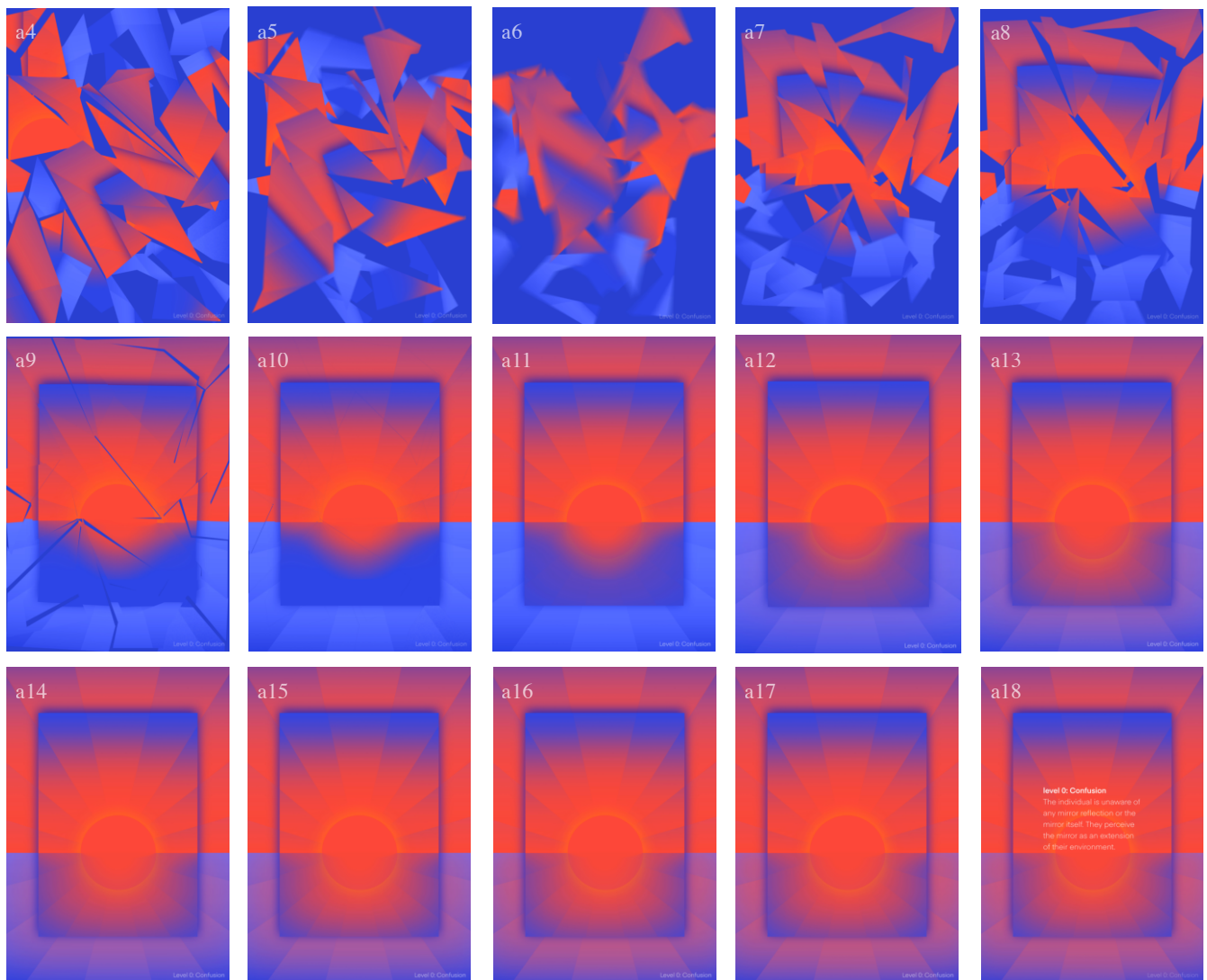
The individual is unaware of any mirror reflection or the mirror itself. They perceive the mirror as an extension of their environment, not a reflection of it (Rochat 2013).

At the beginning of the animation, the fragments assemble into the sunrise scene. The sunrise scene are used as metaphor for an extension of their environment in level 0. The 19th century philosopher William James wrote that we are born in a state of “blooming, buzzing, confusion.” We don’t have any knowledge about the subjective perceptions of life. The first shot consisting of fragments represents the state of complete confusion and lack of orders. The specular image in the mirror which is the rectangle, like an extension of surrounding environment. When the sun appears on the horizon, the sun and the boundless ocean joint together. When the sunlight reaches ocean’s surface, its surface reflects observable images of the sun and the sunlight extends to full picture. The end of animation indicates that almost everyone think they are self-awareness because we are happier see ourselves in a positive light. Tasha Eurich calls the factor is the “cult of self”, the idea that we’ve become more self-absorbed as social media has exploded in popularity (Kauflin 2017).



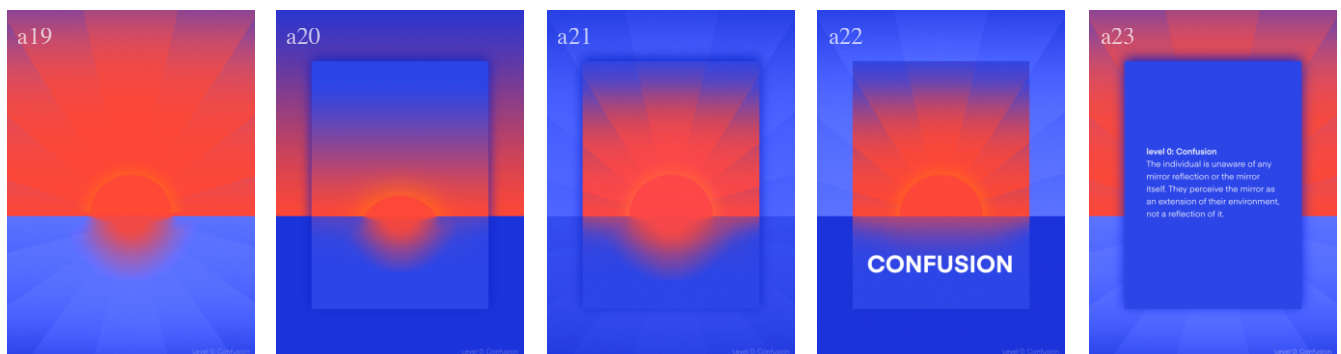
*Figure 4, Level 0: Confusion (a1-a3)*

## Image Sequence



*Figure 5, Level 0: Confusion (a4-a18)*

## Iteration



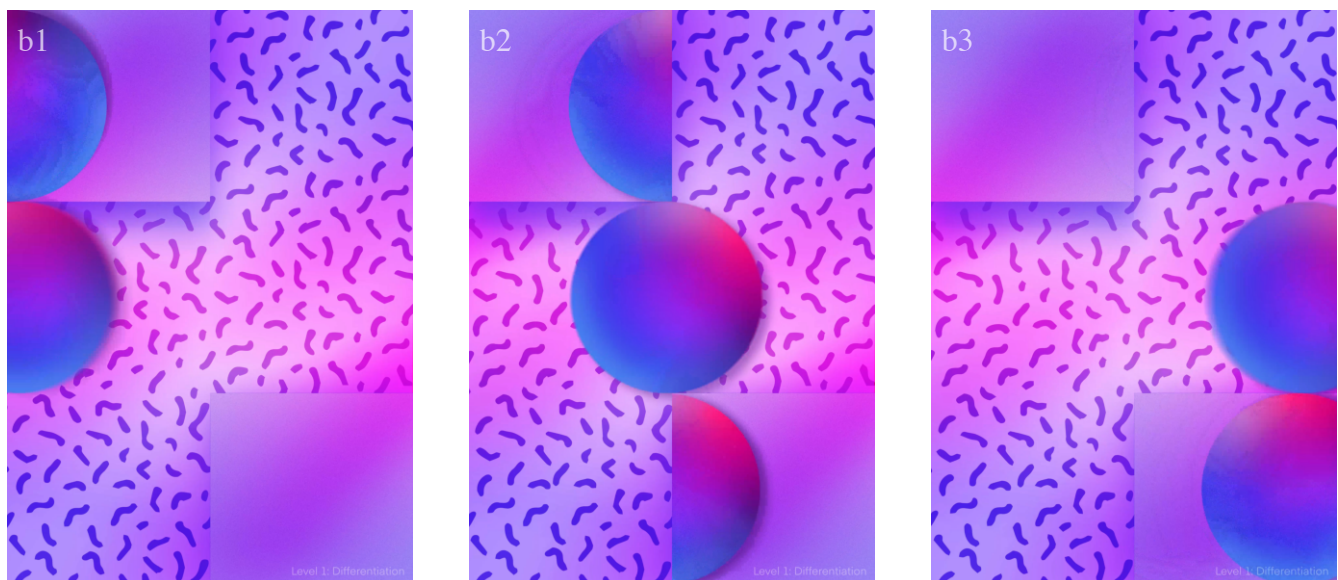
*Figure 6, Level 0: Confusion (a19-a23)*



## Level 1: Differentiation

The individual realizes the mirror is able to reflect things. They see that what is in the mirror is different from what is surrounding them (Rochat 2013).

In this animation, when the sphere completes its rolling motion from left to right, the two rectangles can reflect its motion. There are two layers, the top layer are two rectangles, like mirrors, it can show us the reflection of ourselves. The bottom layer is the small wiggly elements in the background, like the distraction in our life. The top layer indicates that there are two characters, one is that we think we are and another is that we actually are. Most people think they know themselves. But in fact, we are not even aware of our own habits, routines, impulses, and reactions, then we no longer control them, they control us (Mason 2018). The bottom layer seems like the distraction we choose. Most people finding the distraction to avoid pain without realizing it. Staring at phones, obsessing about the past, imagining the futures, never stick to plans are most people daily routines. The key is we need to realize these distraction is that we are willing to choose it. The best way is to split distraction into bite-sized chunks instead of removing all of it or binging on it (Figure 7).



*Figure 7, Level 1: Differentiation (b1-b3)*

## Image Sequence

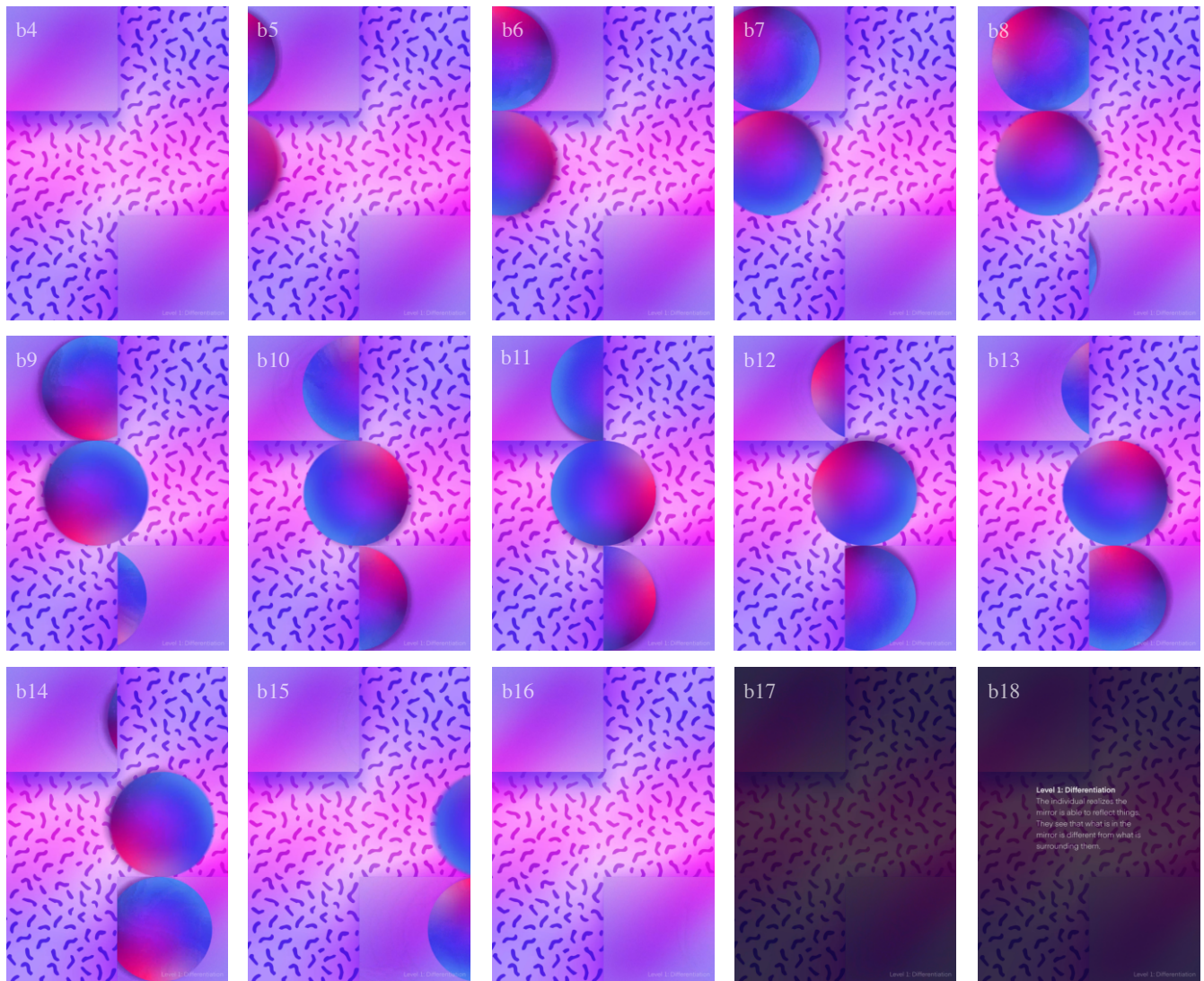


Figure 8, Level 1: Differentiation (b4-b18)

## Iteration

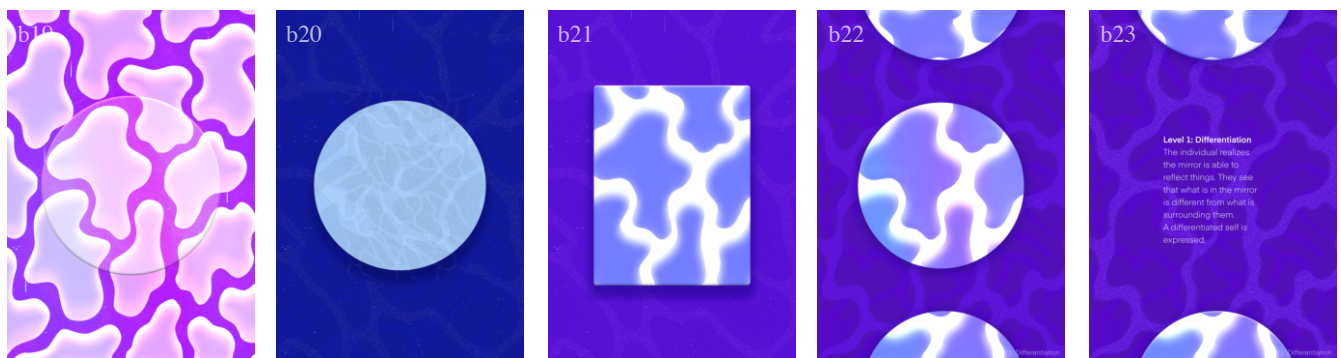
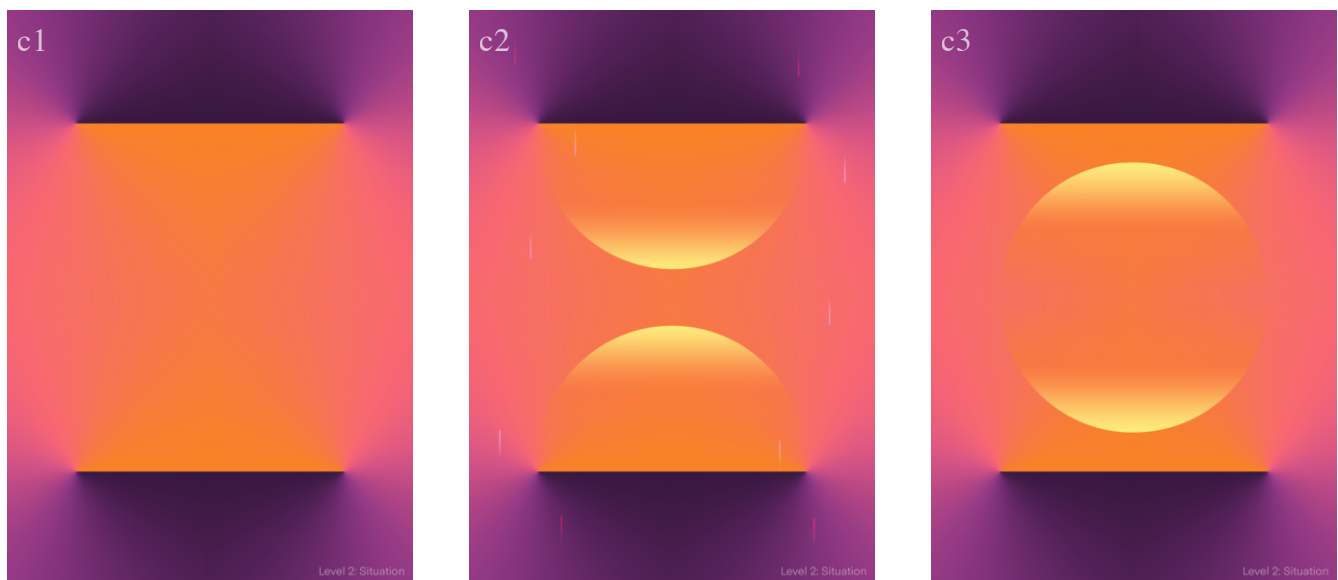


Figure 9, Level 1: Differentiation (b19-b23)

## Level 2: Situation

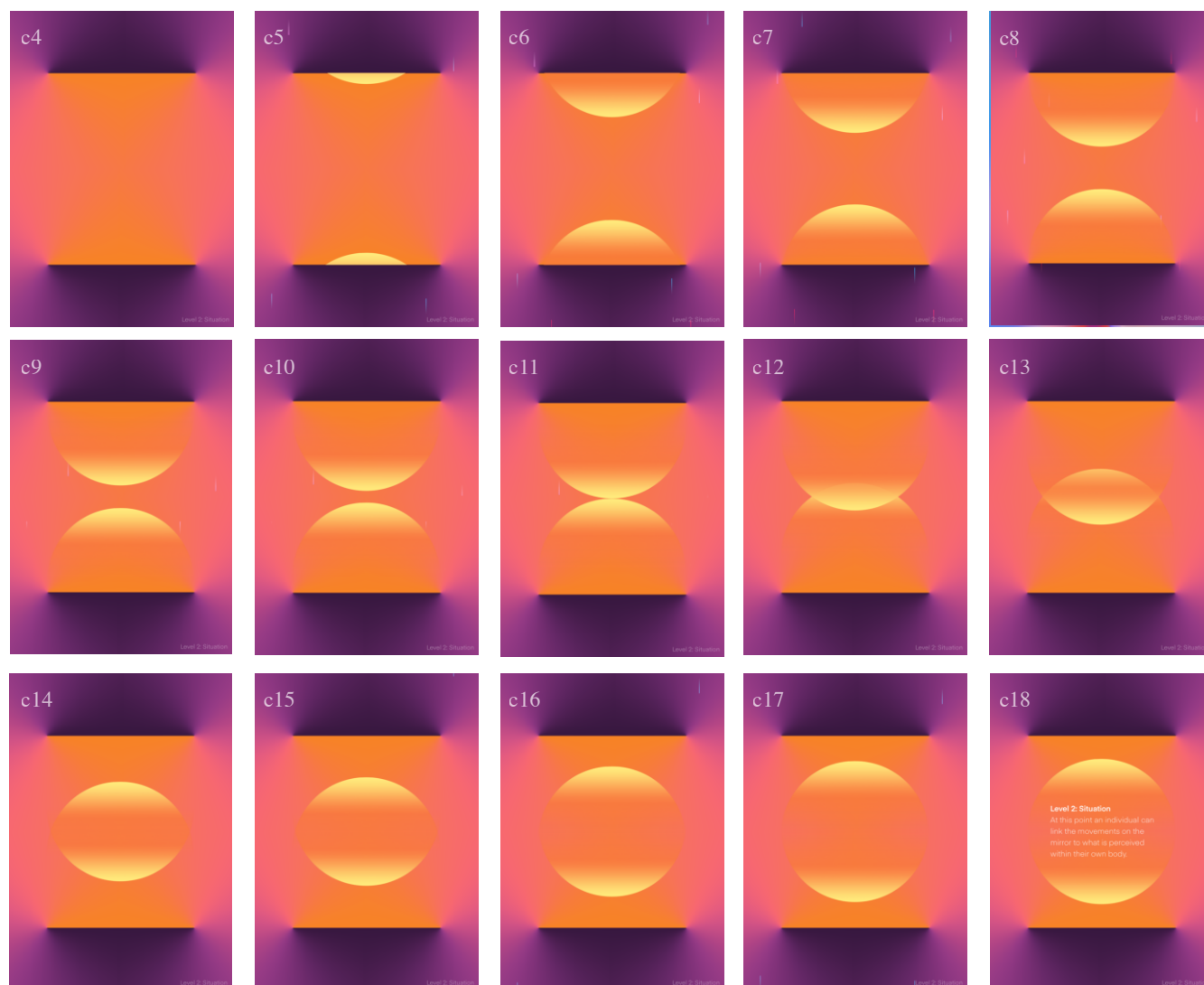
At this point an individual can link the movements on the mirror to what is perceived within their own body (Rochat 2013).

At this level, I designed two symmetric semicircles, the top one represents individual movement and the bottom one represents “mirror image” movement. At the end of animation, the complete circle is formed, as the two semicircles move downward and upward. I intend to use the two symmetric semicircles to represent “Nature” and “Nurture”. “Nature” refers to our physical appearance and personality characteristics. “Nurture” refers to environmental influences, like how we were raised, surrounding culture, and etc. Some strong biological component in our “Nature”, including genetic diseases, physical appearance influenced by environmental factors. They interact with each other and both have a greater influence on our behavior and development. The final shot indicates that “Nature” and “Nurture” blend seamlessly, thereby forming individuals. Understand our “Nature” and “Nurture” can help we see ourselves more clearly (Figure 10).



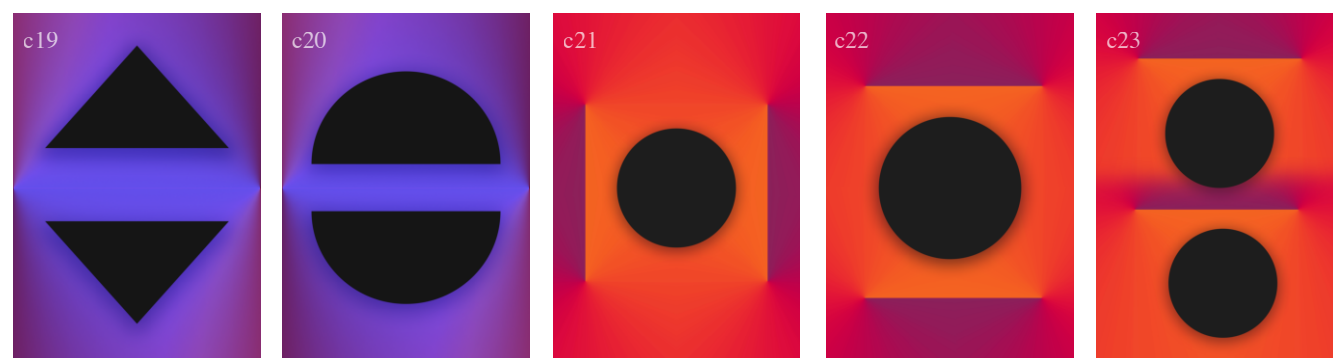
*Figure 10, Level 2: Situation (c1-c3)*

## Image Sequence



*Figure 11, Level 2: Situation (c4-c18)*

## Iteration



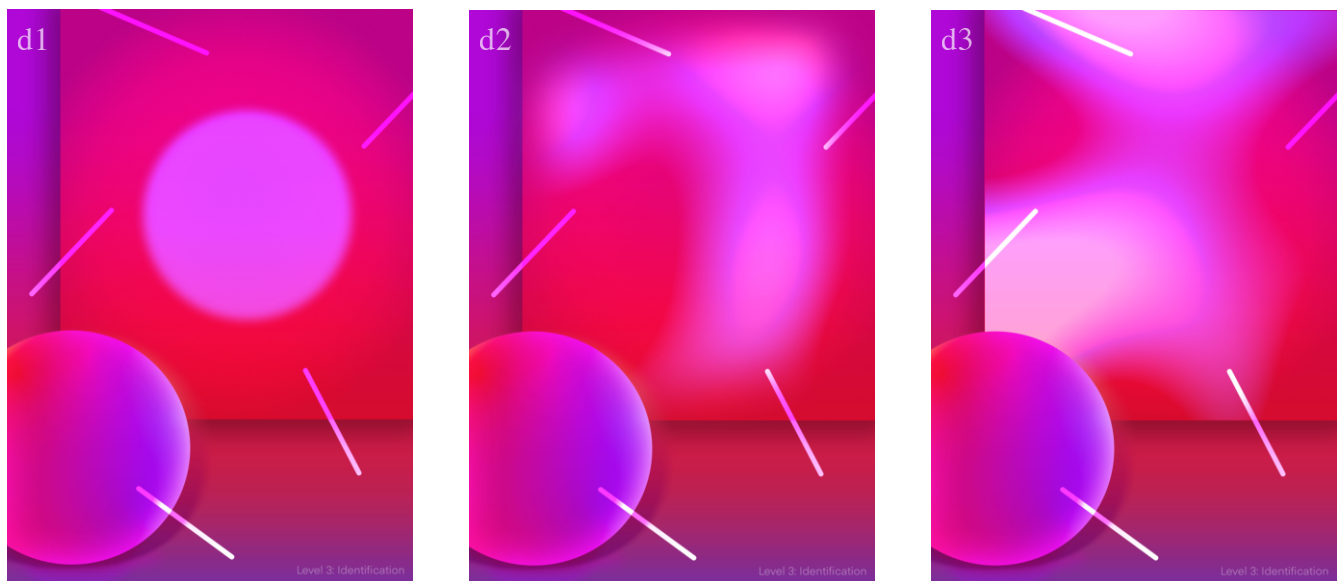
*Figure 12, Level 2: Situation (c19-c23)*



### Level 3: Identifications

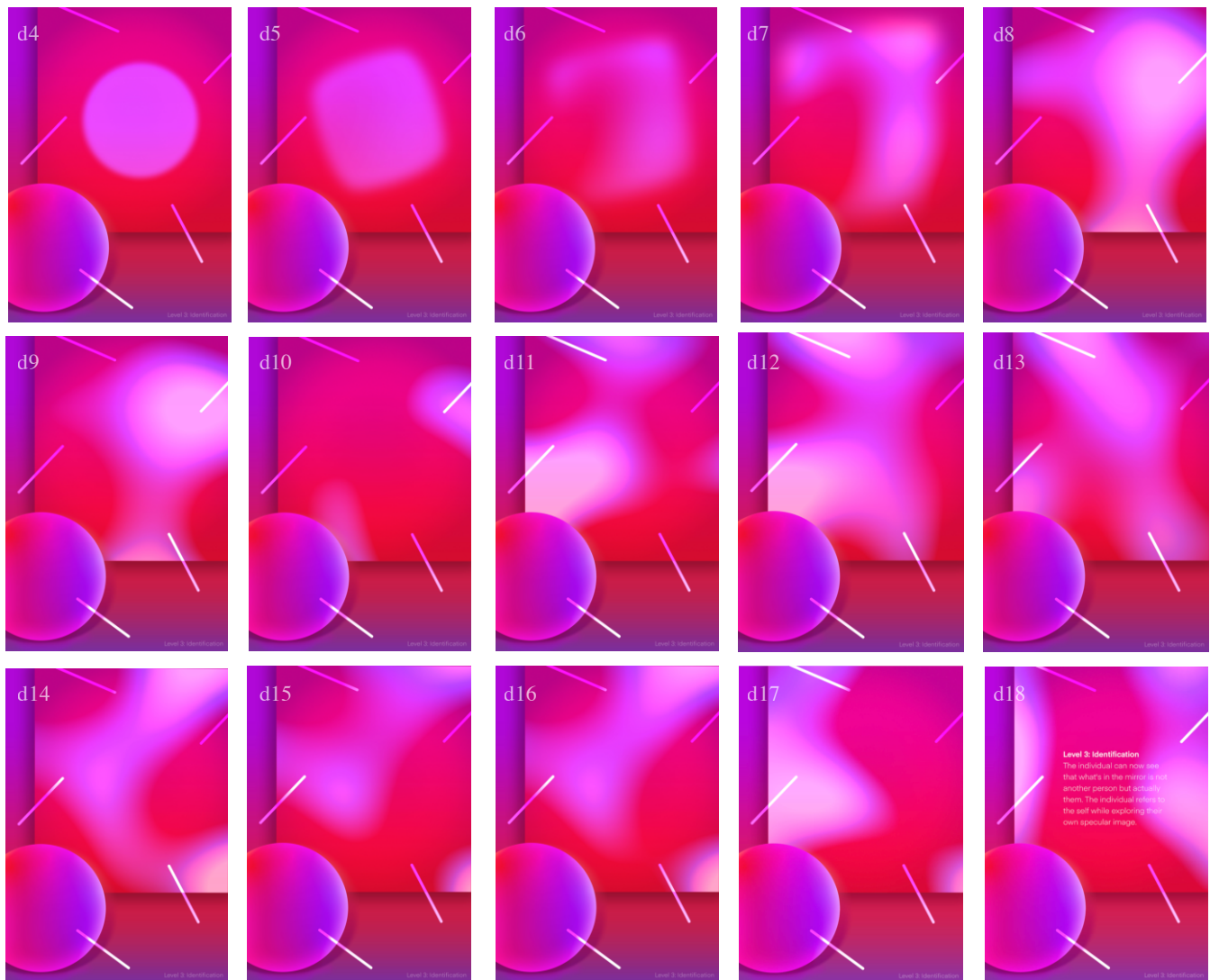
The individual can now see that what's in the mirror is not another person but actually them. This level is expressed when the individual refers explicitly to the self while exploring their own specular image (Rochat 2013).

In the animation, the liquid motion is used to represent individual can refer themselves to explore images. The mirror, which is the rectangle reflects the motion that the circle transformed into the different softy liquid shapes. At the beginning of the animation, the circle in the rectangle represents the person we think we are. The different liquid shape in the mirror represents what other think of you. We prefer to operate on autopilot, unaware of how we are behaving, and why. Actually, finding “loving critic” who love to offer truly and subjective criticism and feedback can help us realize our blind spot, and give a direct response of our behavior (Figure 13).



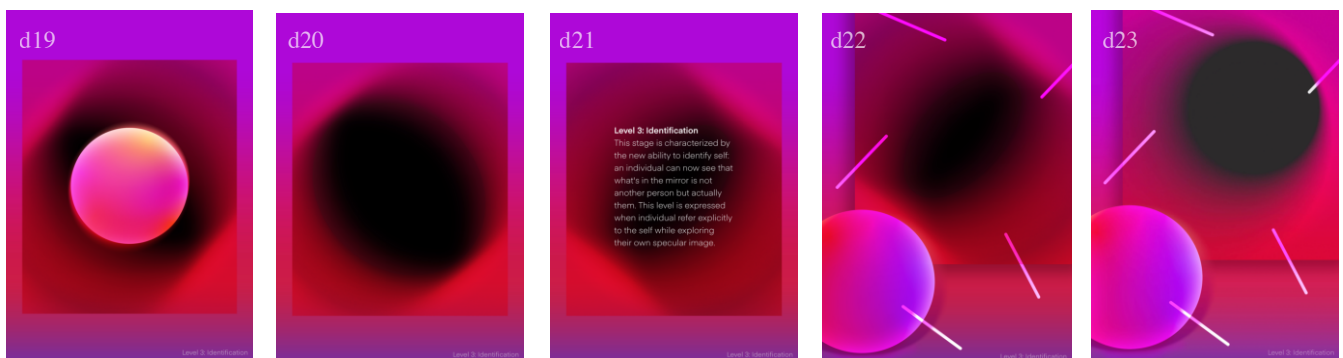
*Figure 13, Level 3: Identifications (d1-d3)*

## Image Sequence



*Figure 14, Level 3: Identifications (d4-d18)*

## Iteration

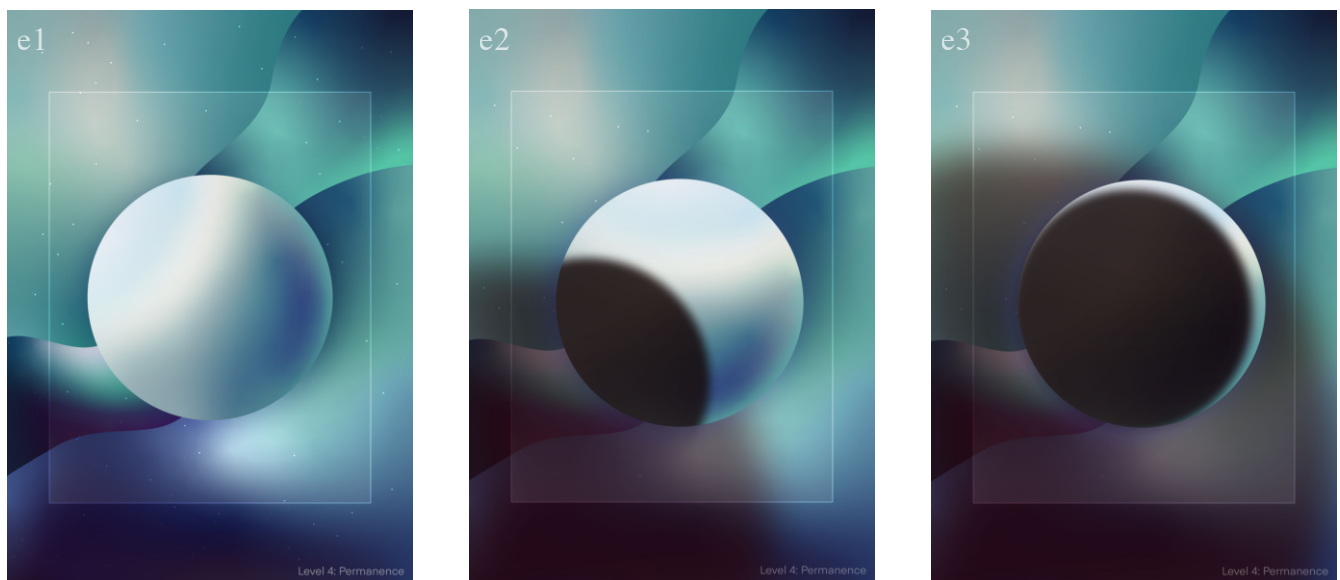


*Figure 15, Level 3: Identifications (d19-d23)*

#### Level 4: Permanence

The individual can identify the self beyond the present mirror imagery. They are able to identify the self in previous pictures looking different or significantly younger (Rochat 2013).

At this level, a lunar eclipse is used to explain that individual has different appearances at different times. In this process, the moon appears to change shape through time depends on how much light it receives from the sun. It indicates that our physical appearance and personality change as age. The goal of self-awareness is self-acceptance. We don't need to criticize our current unsatisfied situation influenced by our previous experiences and upbringing. We should try to realize and accept situation as we are right now, without judging. After that we can place ourselves in the best position in the future. Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist said that "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." We should embraces the ideas of radical acceptance. It is about to see reality, completely accept reality, and then move forward. It encourages us to positively change and improve our situation (Figure 16).



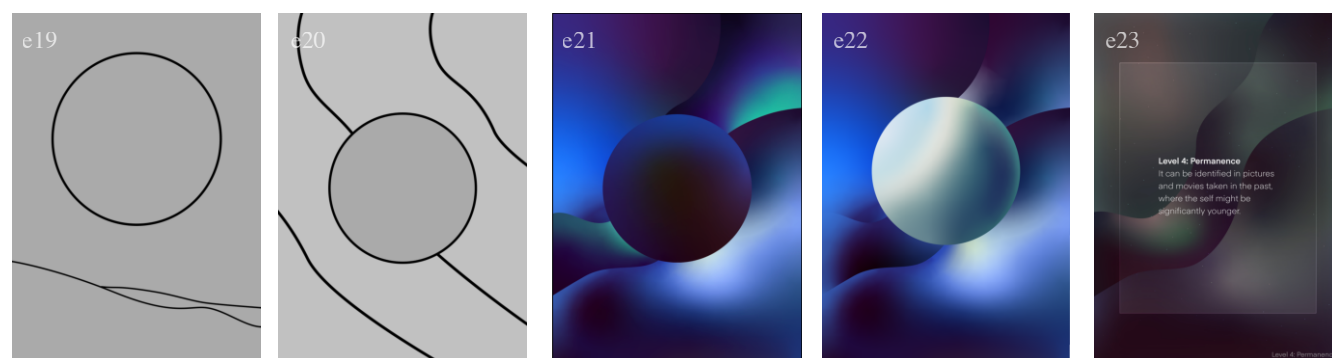
*Figure 16, Level 4: Permanence (e1-e3)*

## Image Sequence



*Figure 17, Level 4: Permanence (e4-e18)*

## Iteration



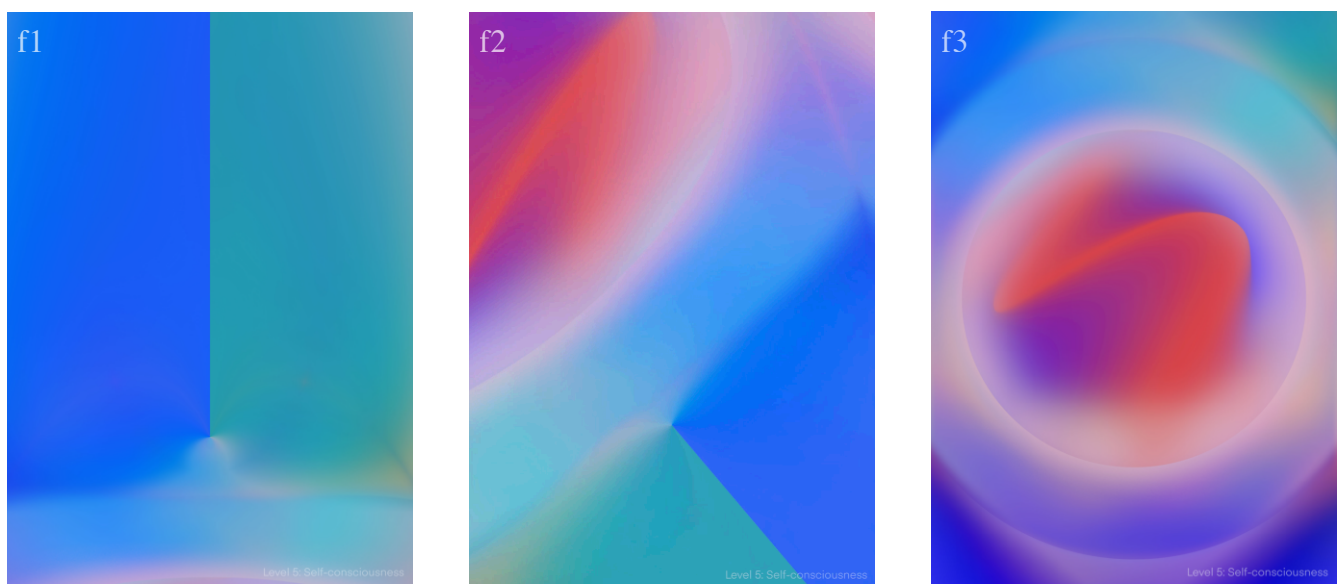
*Figure 18, Level 4: Permanence (e19-e23)*



## Level 5: “meta” self awareness

The self is now recognized not only from a first-person perspective but also from a third person's. They begin to understand they can be in the mind of others (Rochat 2013).

Light refraction metaphor is used for this level. If you look at the background image through the glass, the image will be reversed and distorted. It means that if you look at something from a different angle, you will think of it from a different point of view. At the beginning of animation, the composition split in half. It indicates that we can visualize events, behaviors, and ourselves from first-person perspective and third-person perspective. Perspective influences the way that people understand events. First-person perspective is to see the event unfolding as they would see it in real life. Third-person perspective is to see the event unfolding from observer's perspective in real life. Perspective influences the way that people understand events. The third-person perspective could represent a useful and cost-effective means of promoting health behavior change (Rennie, L.J., Harris, P.R. and Webb, T.L 2016). At the end of animation, the composition will be totally different from the first shot through rotation. If we visualize our behavior from two perspectives, we can become better individuals, develop a better relationship with others (Figure 19).



*Figure 19, Level 5: “meta” self-awareness (f1-f3)*

## Image Sequence

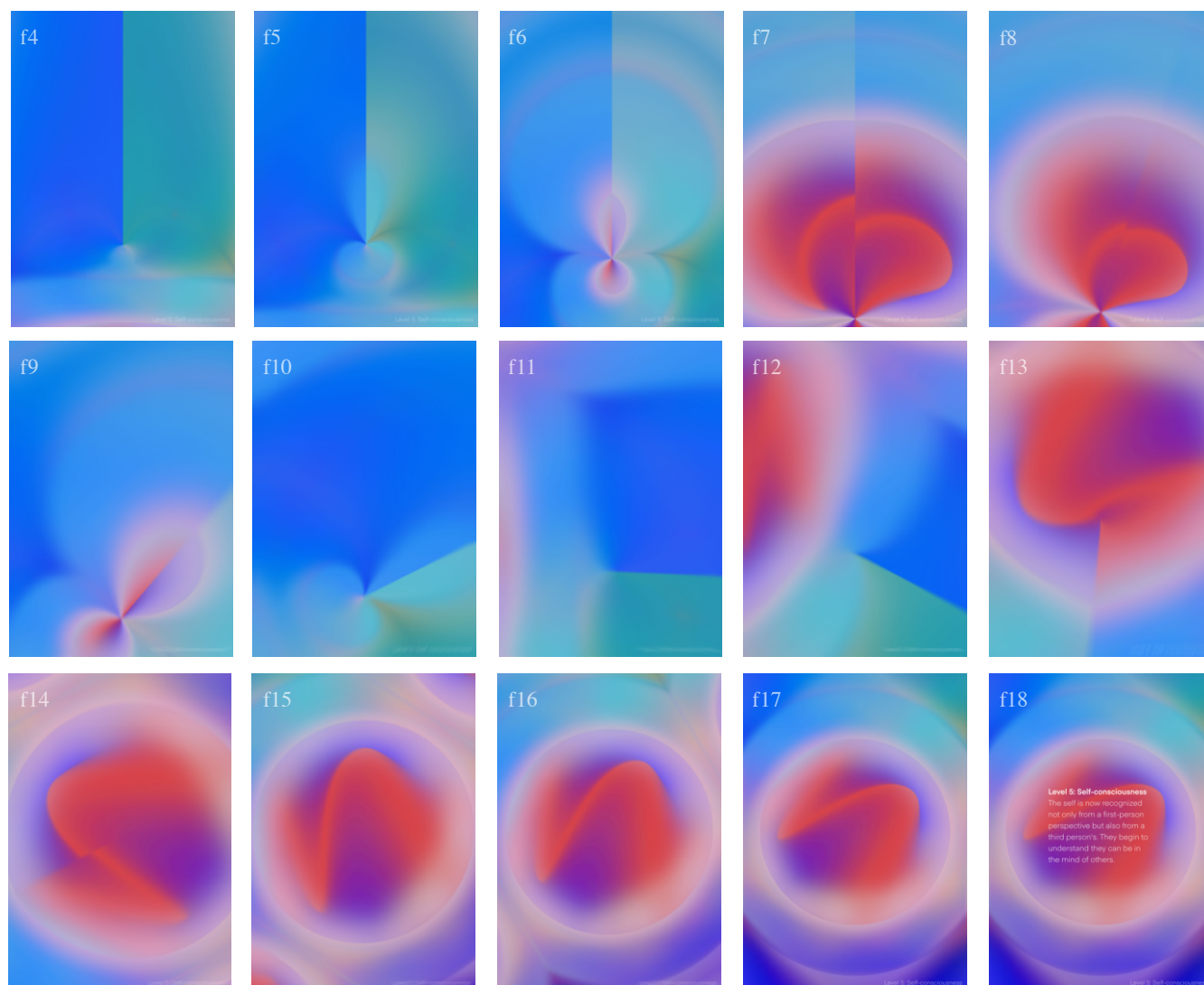


Figure 20, Level 5: “meta” self-awareness (f4-f18)

## Iteration

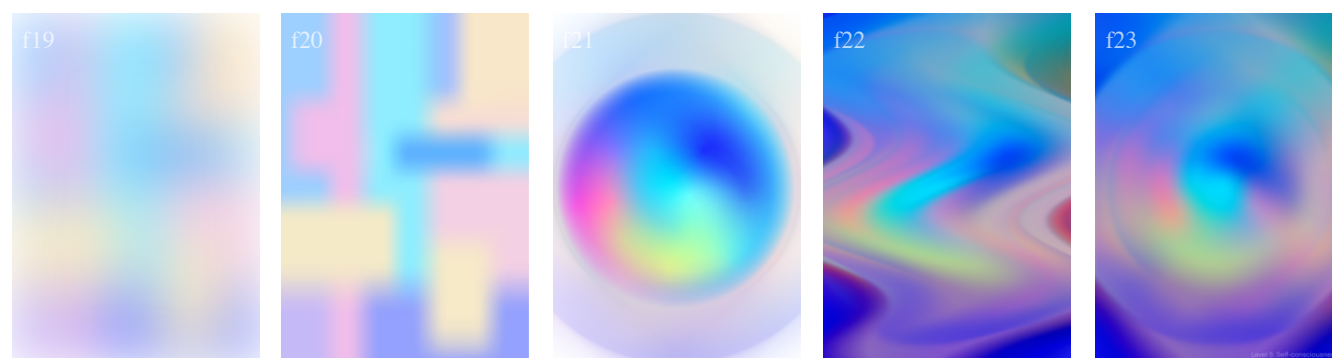


Figure 21, Level 5: “meta” self-awareness (f19-f23)

### Section III: Results

The final design is a series of dynamic poster based on motion graphics illuminating five levels of self-awareness child development. This is aimed at guiding viewers to experienced the formation of self-awareness again and inspire viewers to cultivate self-awareness. The final design has been exhibited in Imagine RIT, which is the annual festival in Rochester, NY. The series of dynamic posters have been showed on digital screen as regards RGB color. I considered that if I convert color to CMYK for printing, the abundant gradient color will be dark, dim and even dirty. Thus, the final design is only about digital show for protecting the tasteful color. And only I just achieve perfection about visual design, audience can be hooked and be willing to spend time enjoying every fragment of dynamic posters (Figure 22).



*Figure 22, Self-awareness*

## **Section IV: Evaluation & Discussion**

People are actually hooked when dynamic posters are visually stunning. I asked all audience how they feel about each dynamic posters. All viewers can divided into two parts, one part is audience who have no background knowledge of self-awareness. They have to figure out the messages what I want to convey through the context of five levels at the end of animations. However, only about half of them can understand the hidden meaning completely. Almost all of them can fully understand and keep watching many times after listening to my explanation of dynamic posters. Another part is audience who have some background knowledge of self-awareness. They said they can understand part of artwork through the content of five levels at the end of animations, but some metaphor need to be dug deeper. They can fully understand the series of dynamic posters after I elaborated the artwork to them. During this process, I acquire lots of valuable information some audience shared me some resource about self-awareness, like official accounts in social media, articles and website regarding self-awareness.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the artwork has impressed the audience by the modern vibrant gradient style and motions. It aims to educate people how to have a deeper, more complex appreciation of who they are is. The advantage of this, as we will see later, is that it helps us create what we want and master our life, be more confident and see things from the perspective of others. As a newest generation of “Chinese-style” individual, raise 90s generation awareness of self-awareness is my original intention. Learning how to understand ourselves and get along with ourselves is the important lesson in our life. I hope that this artwork can evoke their attention, inspire them to understand themselves.

This is my first artwork for psychological topic. The series of dynamic posters contain lots of information for viewers. But I found that most of viewers can not acquire all information without the explanation of the artwork. Thus, I considered that the traditional exhibition can be upgraded to online exhibition in the future. Providing a detailed explanation beside artwork can promote an experience for viewers. Otherwise, online exhibition allows views to instantly share design projects in social media. Improving the influence of self-awareness helps more people to pay more attention on it.

## Appendix



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